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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3120

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0241

RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFITT/USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUALSFJJ/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 001895

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DEPT FOR PM/RSAT AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2017

TAGS: PREL MARR MASS MOPS PTER IZ JA

SUBJECT: MAINTAINING PARTICIPATION IN THE IRAQ COALITION:

JAPANESE DIET BEGINS DEBATING RENEWAL OF ENABLING

LEGISLATION

REF: STATE 55436

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Joe Donovan for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Japanese Diet April 24 began debating government proposed legislation to extend the deployment to Iraq of Japanese Air Self Defense Forces (ASDF) for an additional two years beginning at the end of July. Although the law is expected to be passed, the issue of Japanese forces in Iraq is becoming more contentious. For the present, however, we see no wavering on the part of the Abe Administration to continue to support our efforts in Iraq, either through the extension of economic assistance or the presence of small numbers of Self Defense Forces personnel. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Reftel requests Embassy to demarche the Japanese "at the highest appropriate level" to stress the importance of maintaining participation in the Iraq Coalition. Prime Minister Abe will be meeting with President Bush April 26-27, and Japanese support for our policies in Iraq is on the agenda for the two leaders to discuss. We are in frequent, if not daily contact with MOFA about this subject as well. In a tangible demonstration of support, the Abe Administration April 24 introduced legislation in the Diet that will allow ASDF forces stationed in Kuwait to continue to support Operation Iraqi Freedom with flights into Iraq for another two years when the current authorization, enacted in June 2003, expires at the end of July.

¶3. (C) While passage of this legislation is widely expected, the issue of Japanese participation in the Coalition is becoming politically more contentious. The opposition has for the third time introduced legislation - which we judge will be unsuccessful - to end Japanese participation in OIF, and recent newspaper editorials have questioned the continued deployment of ASDF aircraft and personnel. Other articles have questioned the use of Japanese aircraft, alleging they are being used mostly to transport coalition forces, not "humanitarian and reconstruction materials" as the law requires. (NOTE: Japan has three C-130 aircraft and approximately 200 personnel stationed at Ali Al Salim Air Base in Kuwait. END NOTE.) MOFA Director General for Middle Eastern and African Affairs Norihiro Okuda told Embassy Tokyo that the government will face tough questions about extending the participation of Japanese forces and called this his "toughest issue." But he remains confident the legislation

will pass.

¶4. (C) Despite the increasing volume of the opposition, PM Abe shows no signs on backing down on Japan's commitments to Iraq. Facing questioning in the Diet, he is reported in the press to have stated: "Iraq's stability and reconstruction are an important theme for the entire international community and directly linked with Japan's national interests.

Preventing Iraq from serving as a breeding ground for terrorists and helping that country to recover as a peaceful and democratic country is meaningful in view of the stability of the international community and in the sense of meeting our country's national interests." He called for early passage of the legislation, although debate will likely continue through June.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: We judge that Japan will for the foreseeable future continue to support efforts to see Iraq transformed into a stable, secure, and prosperous democratic nation at peace with its neighbors. This support will include the deployment of ASDF aircraft and personnel to support coalition and United Nations activities for the next two years.

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